

## Survey reveals risks to UK competitiveness as study destination

Earlier this year, the British Council commissioned a survey of Chinese education agents to gain an understanding of their perspectives on the international education market in China. While agents still recommend the UK as a top study destination at all levels of education, concerns over the UK's visa policy and the lack of opportunities to gain work experience suggest the UK is at risk of losing this status.

### Background

More than 100 education agents registered with the Ministry of Education participated in the survey, representing a large proportion of agents active in China's market for international education. The survey's aim was to:

- Understand the market context in which agents work;
- assess the attractiveness of the UK as a study destination;
- identify any risks to the UK's competitiveness as a study destination.

### Key Findings

#### Market context:

- o 60 per cent of students preparing to study abroad use education agents;
- o 64 per cent of agents help more than 50 students go abroad every year;
- o 95 per cent of agents focus on the UK as a study destination (US 69 per cent, Australia 53 per cent, Canada 48 per cent, New Zealand 29 per cent).

#### Emerging trends:

- o 66 per cent of agents reported an increase or a large increase in enquiries for study abroad at school level;
- o 53 per cent of agents reported an increase or a large increase in enquiries for study abroad at postgraduate level;
- o 49 per cent of agents reported an increase or a large increase in enquiries for study abroad at pre-university level (foundation and pathway programmes).

#### UK attractiveness as a study destination:

- o The top reasons for recommending the UK as a study destination at all levels of education are the global recognition of the UK's qualifications and its high-quality educational offering;
- o the top reasons for recommending the UK as a study destination at degree level are the relatively short duration required to earn a UK qualification and the resulting cost-effectiveness;
- o the top reasons for recommending the UK as a study destination at school level are the UK's cultural environment and relative safety.

#### Risks to the UK's competitiveness as a study destination:

Around 42 per cent of those agents who provided recommendations voiced concerns over the difficulty for students in gaining work experience in the UK due to a lack of opportunities and restrictive visa policies, noting that the chance to gain international work experience is an important consideration for many students considering study abroad. Some agents called for the reintroduction of the post-study work visa, noting that the current visa policy is putting the UK in a disadvantaged position compared to other popular overseas study destinations, such as the US, Canada and Australia, who offer more post-study work opportunities than the UK.